

# HOW ANTIOXIDANTS PROTECT YOU



Why are the antioxidants in fruits and vegetables so important? Because they're kind of like a "cleaning crew" that hauls away the junk your cells leave behind:

- **Every cell in your body has a job.**  
Your cells work 24 hours a day building and repairing your bones, muscles, skin, and other body parts.
- **As your cells do their job, they create byproducts.**  
Some of these molecules are good. But some can build up like trash around a construction site.
- **One type of trash is a free radical.\***  
Every day, your body produces thousands of these highly reactive, oxygen-powered molecules. You're also exposed to them through environmental factors like cigarette smoke, UV radiation from the sun, and not eating right. What makes free radicals so harmful is that they don't just build up. They actually attach themselves to other cells and cause damage.
- **Your body also produces antioxidants\* to keep things under control.**  
Antioxidants make the free radicals less reactive and, therefore, less damaging. They also clear away some of the trash.
- **Antioxidants in certain foods.**  
Mainly plant products like fruits and vegetables can boost your body's "cleaning crew." Research shows that eating lots of antioxidants may reduce your risk of cancer and heart disease, help control diabetes, and even slow the physical and mental effects of aging.

## Top 20 food sources of antioxidants

- Small red beans (dried)
- Wild blueberries
- Red kidney beans (dried)
- Pinto beans
- Blueberries (cultivated)
- Cranberries
- Artichokes (cooked)
- Blackberries
- Dried prunes
- Raspberries
- Strawberries
- Red Delicious apples
- Granny Smith apples
- Pecans
- Sweet cherries
- Black plums
- Russet potatoes (cooked)
- Black beans (dried)
- Plums
- Gala apples

(continued on next page)

**HUMANA**  
Guidance when you need it most

## Definitions:

- A free radical is a molecule that — because it has an unpaired electron — steals an electron from a nearby molecule, which causes that molecule to be unstable and seek to steal an electron from another nearby molecule. As this process continues, it causes a chain reaction that results in oxidation and cell damage. Free radicals have been implicated in cancer and other serious diseases.
- An antioxidant is a molecule that prevents the damage done by free radicals by stopping the oxidation. Antioxidants are found in fruits and vegetables.

## Source:

[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)

**HUMANA**  
*Guidance* when you need it most